1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

lineage, either as consanguine or classificatory kin. Other lines of relatives are sometimes found, but no relative from the opposite moiety ever belongs to ego's clan. The mari and kutara lines are sometimes members of ego's clan (mari, mother's mother, mother's mother's brother; kutara, sister's daughter's daughter, sister's daughter's son).

An important activity of the clan is war, the clan being the war-making group.[7] Within this group no violent conflict ever takes place, no matter how much cause is given. Members may quarrel, but for clansmen to fight one another would be considered an unnatural act in Murngin society and it never occurs. When the clan is at war the ceremonial leader almost always acts as the war leader. A clan seldom goes to battle as a group against another one, but usually has an eternal feud with certain others which results in occasional ambushes in which a man or two is killed.

The demographic aspects of Murngin society are extremely difficult to ascertain, owing to the roving life and impossibility of a head census. Genealogies showed the Kolpa (northern Wessel Island)[8] to be a group of about twenty-five relatives. The clan itself, as well as those who did not belong to it or their (the Yaernungo) tribe, considered this below the normal population level. The Liaalaomir (Glyde River) clan genealogies include around fifty people; the clansmen seem satisfied with their numbers, possessing a sense of well-being as a group not evident among the Kolpa. This was also true of clans like the Liagaomir (the mainland south of Howard Island) and the Daiuror (interior south of Howard Island). The Wangurri (see page 42 for location) have some sixty or seventy members in their clan. The Warumeri, to their north, now have about forty people, since the last generation suffered a severe loss through a disastrous fight with the Wangurri over the right to certain women.

The Yalukal and Barlmawi at the present time have only one male member each. It is highly likely that such clans will disappear, continuance being dependent upon the male line. The land will continue to belong to the dead clan until in several generations the memory of it is lost and new traditions have filled the thought of the natives. The land and water holes will then belong to another group which will have been occupying it since the demise of its former owners. The

[7] The statement that the clan is a war-making group needs further elaboration and amendments which are given in Chapter VI.

[8] See map, page 40, and list of clans, pages 39-51.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

If armed conflict breaks out in a camp where a ceremony is being celebrated, the ritual is usually stopped, either because the participants are afraid to stay, for they may be killed in their sleep, or because the leaders of the ceremony become angry at what they consider an insult to their totems.

It is believed that while a totemic emblem is in camp all fighting should cease, and any infraction of the tribal law is considered a direct insult to the totemic emblem and therefore to the clan. The leader of a Narra ceremony, at which the totemic emblems are used, almost always stops the ritual if there has been any serious infraction of tribal law, because he does not want to accept the consequences of an affront to his totem. It is believed that the totem itself would seek vengeance upon any leader who did not protect its interests at such a time. The writer saw two Narra, a Djungguan, and two Gunabibi ceremonies terminated because of the outbreak of fighting. The two Narra were stopped by the leaders because they said their totems were insulted, the Djungguan and Gunabibi because of the fighters' fear of death and also because of the anger of the leader of the ceremony. Another Narra ceremony was not stopped when a fight followed the catching of two women in adultery by their husbands. The women were thoroughly beaten—less because of the offense itself than because it took place while a great ceremony was being held—and might have been killed but for their escape in the black of night by swimming to a nearby island.

The deliberate stopping of a ceremony demonstrates that warfare and ceremony have clearly antithetical traits. The great ceremonies tend to enlarge the group solidarity both in numbers and in extent of territory and to create a smoothly functioning unit out of a large number of clans, but warfare destroys this unity and reduces the limits of solidarity to the clan.

Since both traits are necessary to the tribe's social organization, a nice periodical balance has been struck; at one period ceremonialism controls the people's activities, and later war is uppermost in the relations of the local groups.

Effects of Warfare on Population

A fairly accurate estimate places the population of this area around three thousand. The genealogical material gathered by the writer shows about an equal number of women and men, with possibly slightly more men than women. This means that there are about fifteen hun-

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

dred men, more than half of whom have not reached the age of sixteen. This leaves approximately seven hundred men who are looking for mates among the same number of women. The statistical average of wives to one middle-aged man is three and one-half. Part of the discrepancy between the total numbers of married women and men is accounted for by the fact that women are taken in marriage just before they reach the age of puberty; although sexual intercourse is not indulged in until after puberty, the women otherwise are treated as wives. A second factor in establishing the unequal ratio is that men up to the age of twenty, and frequently to twenty-five, are without wives or have only one wife; they must wait either for the action of the levirate or for some of the younger females to mature. The two factors just named as expressions of the disproportionate sexual ratio in marriage do not account, however, for a sufficient number of women to make up the difference. The killing of young men below the age of twenty-five, because of the ever-present blood feuds, makes up the balance.

The one important effect of warfare on Murngin society is the seasonal slaying of a small proportion of young men who have passed adolescence and are potential or eligible mates.

In the summary of men killed in battle the writer recorded about one hundred deaths in the last twenty years caused by war. These figures obviously do not include all of the deaths from this cause. There are none recorded for the people south of Caledon Bay and only a few for those around Wessel Island and the English Company Islands, where heavy fighting has always taken place. It would be safe, on the basis of population, to add another hundred deaths to the figure above, making a total of two hundred men killed. Since each man averages three and one-half women, these men would have appropriated seven hundred women of the available supply, or, in terms of the present situation, the tribes needed seven hundred women less than they would have, had the men lived.

Warfare, then, is one of the mechanisms on which polygyny is based. If war were abolished, the percentage of men would increase, and the pressure on the social structure created by seeking mates would probably be too strong for the present form of polygyny, with its attendant mechanisms, the levirate and sororate, to survive. Since these latter mechanisms do much toward strengthening the society and preventing chaos attendant on the transfer of a woman from one clan to another, it will be seen that warfare, while destroying one type of

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

conclusion that in north-east Arnhem Land, the natives really did know the physiological facts, but were not interested in them; they were only interested in 'spiritual conception', which established a person's place in the social and religious structure of the tribe. But whatever be the degree of knowledge or ignorance regarding the physiological facts, there is no doubt that the accepted spiritual doctrine is one of pre-existence. The unborn spirits sojourn at the totemic well waiting to be incarnated, or reincarnated; to that centre they will return after death; and without the entry of the pre-existent spirit child into the womb, there could be no conception.

Everyday Matters

Mr Chaseling is not concerned with discussing complex social and religious problems. His aim is to help us know the Aboriginal as he is. To this end he provides much information regarding interesting everyday affairs. There is no smoke-signal code in this region, and message sticks are simply aids to memory. The Aborigines like having visitors and are anxious to keep them. Like the rest of us, they are subject to flattery, and they use a highly developed form of praise in asking for favours. The status of the women is low, but some affection is shown between spouses; moreover, women do exercise an important influence on affairs; for they live longer on the average than the man (they are not killed in 'wars'), and as a result accumulate a greater knowledge of the everyday myths and legends and of the clan's enemies and friends. There are about three females to each male, another consequence of 'warfare', and connected with this is the fact that usually a man has three wives; but there are a few cases of men with up to twelve wives.

These and many like facts are recorded in the pages which follow, pages which will do much to help readers appreciate the Aborigines of north-east Arnhem Land as human beings,